



# Climate Change and Public Health Preparedness

This year, National Public Health Week, April 7 – 13, is focused on the issue of climate change and health. In addition, the World Health Organization has proclaimed the theme of World Health Day, April 7, to be Climate Change. Climate change is especially important to public health workers involved in preparedness because of the impact it is having on weather patterns and natural disasters.



## What impact will climate change have?

Climate change is a global crisis that will have serious effects around the world. We will face increasing public health challenges due to extreme weather events (floods, heat, storms) and changes in distribution of disease vectors. The work that we have done in planning for public health emergencies will be crucial to planning for and mitigating the impact of these events. Some examples of the types of problems related to climate change that may impact various parts of the U.S. include:

- **Northeast and Midwest:** Major cities like New York and Chicago could experience extreme heat that would mean more heat stress and heat related illness and death, especially among the poor and elderly.
- **Northeast:** Rising temperatures could mean worsening of allergies, while diseases carried by insects or animals could extend their reach.
- **Southeast Atlantic and Gulf Coast:** Hurricanes and other weather events may last longer and become more intense. This could mean bigger storm surges, more damage to buildings and roads, and contaminated food and water. This would make recovery following a disaster more difficult.
- **The Great Plains:** Rising temperatures could mean scorching summers and milder winters – affecting food production and creating new challenges for cities facing extreme heat.
- **Northwest:** Heavy rainfall may lead to flooding and overflow of sewage systems, contaminating water supplies and increasing the risk of disease spread.
- **Southwest:** Higher temperatures and less rainfall will strain already limited water sources and affect the drinking water supply. Wildfire risks and air pollution may increase.
- **Alaska:** Loss of snow pack and retreating sea ice are already changing the lives of wildlife and native people.
- **Pacific Islands:** Rising sea levels may flood atolls and islands, damaging or destroying food crops and contaminating drinking water.

## What is public health's role?

- The public health community has an important role to play in making the connection between the way we lead our lives, our impact on the planet, and the planet's impact on our health and well-being. Given the impact that a changing climate will have on disasters and public health emergencies, we need to educate policy makers and elected officials at the local, state and national level so that they understand the linkage between climate change and health. We need to emphasize the unique contribution that public health can make to discussions about climate change.
- Locally, get the word out to your community about simple actions individuals can take to reduce their contribution to climate change, while also helping their families live healthier lifestyles. You can lead by example in your own community and workplace.

## What steps can we take in our daily lives to impact climate change?

Making a few small changes can have a big impact on both the climate and our community's health. The following five steps will help you, your family and your community to become healthier while creating a healthier planet:

- **Be Prepared.** Learn about the health impacts of climate change and regional climate change issues facing your community and take steps to prepare for possible disasters. To learn how, visit <http://www.ready.gov/>
- **Travel Differently.** Leave the car at home one day, and take public transportation instead. Walk or bike – if you need to drive, carpool – and, if you can, telecommute.
- **Eat Differently.** Buy food from a community farmer's market and food that doesn't travel across the country to get to your supermarket shelves. Eat more vegetables and less meat.
- **Green Your Work.** Use recycled paper if you don't already do so, and even if you do, print less often and on both sides of the paper. Set your computer to energy-saver mode and buy eco-friendly office furniture.
- **Green Your Home.** Insulate your home so that energy isn't literally going out the window. Reduce your use of wasteful products, reuse or recycle the products you do use and conserve water.

To find out more about climate change and National Public Health Week and World Health Day, visit <http://www.nphw.org/> and <http://www.who.int/world-health-day/en/>



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*The purpose of this newsletter is to provide preparedness information to public health professionals.  
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